



Iowa Outdoors

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Feb. 22, 2005

1. Recognizing Peregrine Falcons at Capitol
2. Annual Deer Population Survey Underway
3. Plant Native Trees and Shrubs for Best Results

RECOGNIZING PEREGRINE FALCONS AT CAPITOL

From a thousand feet above Capitol's golden dome, the long-winged raptor folded its aerial form and became a projectile of feathered mass. Its great foot was clenched as the bird bulleted downward and knuckled its quarry at 260 mph. The pigeon poofed into a shower feathers. The Peregrine Falcon's prey was retrieved in mid air and cached on a Capitol ledge for the bird's mate.

The dynamic world of Peregrine Falcons has escalated to new heights over Iowa. In commemoration of these birds, a peregrine display will be unveiled at 11:30 a.m., Feb. 24, second floor of Capitol, North wing.

Since 1993 downtown Des Moines has benefited from a peregrine pair that has nested atop American Republic Insurance building at 601 6th Ave. The male, 93T, was released in 1990 in Cedar Rapids by a cadre of volunteers, falconers, and Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as a means to reintroduce these birds to the Hawkeye state. The female, R13, was released in Kansas City in 1991 by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.

This pair produced 24 young over the years. In 2003 female R13 was challenged by a younger, more powerful peregrine from Minnesota, Colannade building, 8/*T. As a result of this battle, female R13 was killed and the world of peregrines over Des Moines skies was changed forever – but not forgotten.

Female R13 has been mounted by Mike Steegman with the Marshall County Conservation Board, and in a sense, given a new life. She will continue her environmental outreach as ambassador and a founding member of peregrine recovery in Iowa. Steegman's beautiful creation will be unveiled at the Capitol on Thursday. On

Friday, the display will relocate to west wing of second floor until March 7. The display will return on April 19.

“The Capitol is a wonderful site for exhibiting this display as Des Moines has recently hosted a new peregrine territory,” said Pat Schlarbaum, with the DNR’s wildlife diversity program. Since autumn 2003 female 39/E from NSP Riverside, Minnesota has become established at our Capitol and hopefully will become a second nesting pair. So far its mate has been 93T from original territory west of River over downtown Des Moines. Around the nation in recent years, there are only two other instances of one male defending two mates and territories.

Supporters and friends of peregrine recovery in Midwest will be on hand to discuss details of this meaningful work. Lowell Washburn, falconer and chairman of Iowa Peregrine Falcon Recovery team, will accompany his live falcon, so all can view and share same air space with these magnificent raptors.

For more information, contact Schlarbaum at 515-432-2823.

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ANNUAL DEER POPULATION SURVEY UNDERWAY

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

One more blanket of snow would help. Aerial deer surveys are just about done across Iowa. Another four to six inch snowfall, though, could be enough to let wildlife biologists wrap up those winter counts; a key element in the formula to track deer numbers in a state with red-hot interest in the whitetail’s appetite, travel patterns and reproductive capacity.

The early word indicates a downturn in overall numbers. Still, debate extends from the Iowa Legislature to community task forces to informal coffee shop roundtables, as Iowans map out the best way to reduce crumpled fenders and nighttime raids on hosta beds, yet still enjoy our biggest ‘big game.’ Early this month, with about half the survey results returned, Department of Natural Resources biologist Willy Suchy noted a 12 percent downturn. That reflects the heavy emphasis on hunters to take more does during the fall and winter seasons. Most of the 84,000 extra *antlerless* deer tags available were sold out.

While the aerial surveys are an important element, though, there is more to the picture. “We also do a spring spotlighting survey. We look at deer-vehicle accident figures. We also review hunter survey cards to get all the harvest information,” explains DNR wildlife biologist Tim Thompson. “After putting that together, we get an idea of the deer population; whether it’s going up, down or if it is stable.”

Several ‘deer heavy’ areas show a drop. In Allamakee and Winneshiek counties, surveyors saw a noticeable decrease in deer counted. In his five counties, Thompson is seeing all three trends. “Counts in (rural) Linn and Benton counties were down quite a bit. That followed a 14 inch snowfall, too; really good conditions for flying surveys,” noted Thompson. “In Cedar and (rural) Johnson County, some areas were up; others were down.” He points out that those flights were over three inches of snow; considered marginal conditions. With scarce snow cover, deer are hard to identify against the brown landscape. Objects like stumps and melted-through-to-the ground deer beds also resemble deer, as surveyors look down from 400 feet in the air, moving 80 miles an hour. Final figures for Cedar Rapids are not complete, yet. His crew has yet to fly Washington County.

For urban areas, that eye in the sky is often a helicopter; providing a closer, slower moving look at the landscape below. Iowa City—which pays sharpshooters to kill deer—and Coralville—which allows bow hunters to do likewise—are a focal point of the deer debate. Thompson outlined this winter’s count at the Iowa City Deer Task Force meeting last Tuesday. The aerial tally showed 871 deer in 13 Iowa City/Coralville sectors. Lack of snow cover prevented a flyover last year. In 2003, the count was 1,026.

Thompson cautioned task force members that the figures are a one day ‘snapshot,’ not a hard total that is easily compared year to year. For instance, he points out that current development has dropped numbers in the formerly ‘deer-dense’ Peninsula area. On the other hand, deer numbers have jumped significantly in the wooded area south of the Oakdale Correctional Center, with no hunting allowed. “It indicates (communities) probably have to continue to do something every year,” observed Thompson.

He also noted that Iowa City’s sharpshooting program sometimes preceded and sometimes followed the winter counts. This month, for instance, sharpshooters killed 154 deer, shortly *after* the flyover. With another snowfall, Thompson hopes to re-fly the route, to see whether a corresponding drop appears.

Results from *all* the statewide surveys are being reviewed, as biologists make deer management recommendations. By April, the state’s Natural Resource Commission reviews them, ahead of its season-setting decisions.

Deer By Numbers

Though statewide counts—estimates actually—are still a couple months away; most of the 28 special hunts across Iowa have deer harvest figures.

Bow hunters in Coralville killed 107 deer; 89 of them does. In Dubuque, the same number of does was harvested, out of about 100 total. In Johnson County’s Kent Park, 37 deer were taken by shotgun or bow hunters. That doe/buck ratio is important. “The key to herd reduction is to reduce the number of female deer,” notes DNR depredation biologist Greg Harris. “No male deer is ever going to have a fawn.”

Of 154 antlerless deer targeted by sharpshooters in Iowa City, 97 were does. In Iowa, Iowa City has the only sharpshooting program—paying to have deer killed and processed.

Macbride, Palisades-Kepler Deer Meeting Seeks Public Comment

Faced with growing deer numbers within park boundaries, residents around two state parks will be asked for their input about the prospect of restricted deer hunts next season.

Park officials at Lake Macbride State Park, west of Solon and Palisades-Kepler State Park, west of Mount Vernon, will ask for public comment March 7, at 7 p.m. in the Solon Middle School auditorium, 313 South Iowa Street. The joint session is planned, since the parks are just a few miles apart.

Increased numbers of deer in the parks, documented through annual winter surveys have resulted in noticeable ‘browse damage’ in park vegetation. There currently is no hunting in Macbride’s 2,180 acres nor in Palisades-Kepler’s 840 acres.

Scoring Points With Antlers

Find out how your deer rack ‘scores’ by stopping by the DNR’s Southeast District office, at Lake Darling State Park, March 2 or 3. District wildlife supervisor Don Pfeiffer will measure antlers from noon until 8 p.m. each day, or until the last antler is measured. Pfeiffer is a certified measurer for Iowa Trophy Deer, Pope and Young, Boone and Crockett and Longhunter Society. The service is free.

The district office is three miles west of Brighton, on Highway 1 and 78. Reserve a time by calling 319-694-2430. Otherwise measurements will be done first come, first served. Allow about 20 minutes for each set of antlers to be scored. The session corresponds with the waiting period to allow ‘green’ antlers, taken in the most recent Iowa seasons to ‘dry.’ Pfeiffer encourages antler owners, though, to bring in any old sets that might be around the house, also.

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PLANT NATIVE TREES AND SHRUBS FOR BEST RESULTS

The waning days of winter often find Iowans thinking of spring and about planting trees and shrubs. But what species of trees and or shrubs should you plant? While exotic non native flowering or fancy colored trees and shrubs species may have an exciting appeal, using native trees and shrub seedlings from an Iowa grown nursery is best in terms of low maintenance and a healthy ecosystem.

“Native trees and shrubs are better adapted to Iowa’s extremes in weather and to Iowa soils, providing superior native wildlife habitat,” said John Walkowiak, chief of the

Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau. “Native plants have adapted themselves over time with insect and disease issues, and they are less likely to be stressed than non-native plants during extreme weather events such as late freezes or droughts, and they do offer tremendous spring flowering and fall color opportunities.”

The State Forest Nursery, in Ames, produces hardy, native trees and shrubs at affordable costs for sale to private landowners for reforestation, soil erosion control and wildlife habitat. The State Forest Nursery has a good supply of native trees and shrubs perfect for any wildlife habitat project – whether it is for the backyard, a small acreage or large planting. Of special interest to many Iowans who may just be getting started planting native trees and shrubs, the State Forest Nursery has a 20 tree/shrub Song Bird packet for \$20 and four Wildlife Packets of 200 trees/shrubs for \$90. Call 800-865-2477 or visit www.iowadnr.com/forestry/ for more information.

Good sources for information about native trees and shrubs are your local DNR district foresters, private lands biologists, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, County Conservation Boards or county extension agents or check out www.iowatreeplanting.com.

For more information contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966 or john.walkowiak@dnr.state.ia.us

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